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Indonesia/East Timor: More threats, more violence

Three separate attacks by pro-integration militia groups during East Timor's final two days of voter registration make a mockery of Indonesia's assurances to improve security in the territory, Amnesty International said today.

"The Indonesian authorities have reneged on all their promises to rein in pro-integration militia groups," Amnesty International said. "Instead Indonesia offers them support and protection and, as the events of the past 48 hours show, the violence can flare up at a moment's notice."

Early this morning a registration centre in Same, Manfahi district, had to close temporarily following an attack aimed at students from the Student Solidarity Centre for East Timor (DSMTT) who had set up an information post nearby. DSMTT members were also attacked by militias armed with machetes and knives the previous day in the town of Ainaro. Students have been killed, arbitrarily detained and "disappeared" in recent months by militia groups supported by the Indonesian military and police.

A United Nations registration centre in Batugade, Bobonaro district, also came under attack from armed militia members on 5 August. This followed days of rising tension in the area after local authorities complained about the registration process, in particular about people returning from West Timor to register and the United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor's (UNAMET) refusal to register those with false identification papers.

Before the attack the district head of Bobonaro had threatened to blockade the area and hold UNAMET officials hostage until the registration was completed to their satisfaction. A senior official of the pro-integration group, the People's Front for East Timor (BRTT), also made veiled threats to UNAMET. Hours later at least 50 militia members attacked the local UNAMET compound.

"Public and blatant threats and incitement to violence are being made by the authorities and political leaders, yet the Indonesian authorities do nothing to apprehend these people," Amnesty International said.

"The only conclusion that can be drawn from such lack of action is that the Indonesian government still does not have the political will to see this process through."

"Immediate and sustained international pressure on Indonesia to ensure security for all East Timorese people and UNAMET staff is essential if the ballot in East Timor is to take place as scheduled on 30 August 1999."

"The first step must be for Indonesia to disarm and disband the militia groups without further delay."

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Background
UNAMET has been mandated to carry out a popular consultation process in East Timor leading to a ballot on 30 August 1999 in which voters will choose special autonomy within Indonesia or independence.

The process has been blighted by ongoing serious human rights abuses, mainly carried out by pro-integration militia groups operating with the clear support of the Indonesian military and, to a lesser extent, the police. Among those targeted have been pro-independence supporters, political activists, human rights and humanitarian aid workers, journalists and UNAMET staff.

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